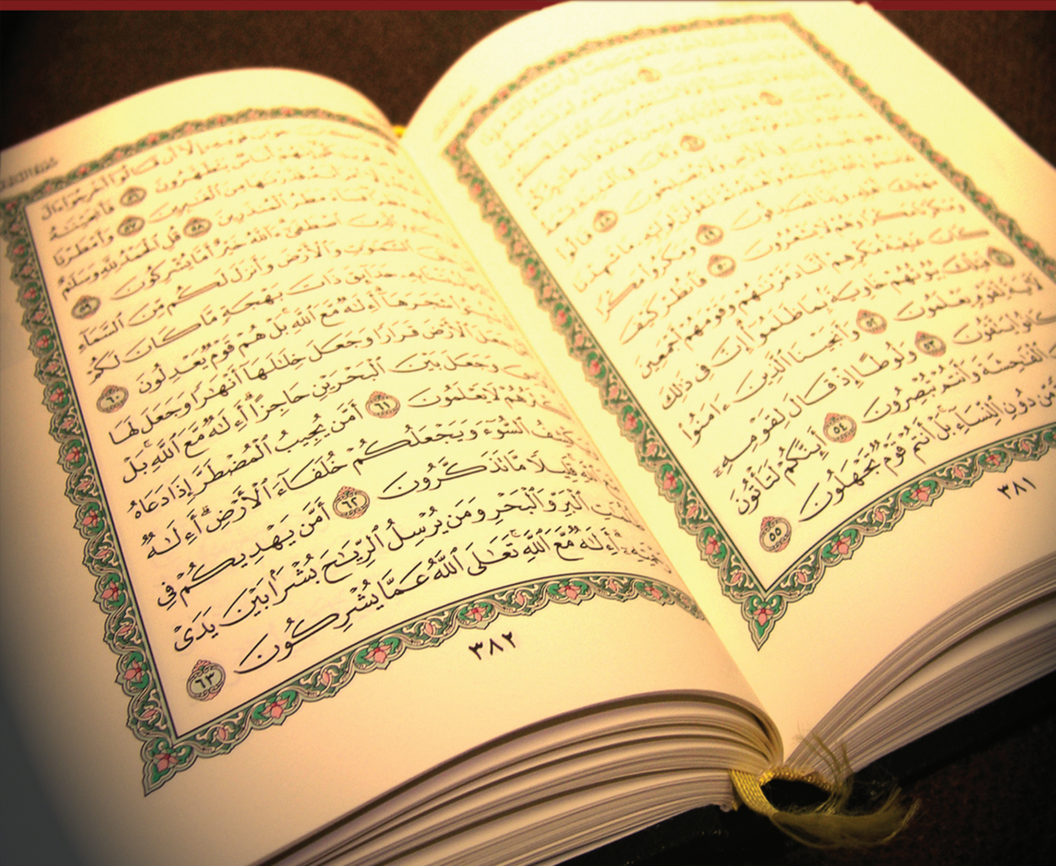
Introduction to the Science of Tafseer of the Qur'an

Written by Ayatullah Ja'far Subhani

Translated by Saleem Bhimji

Foreword by Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi



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Transliteration Table

The method of transliteration of Islāmic terminology from the ʿArabic language has been carried out according to the standard transliteration table mentioned below.

ء	ʾ	ض	ḍ
ا	a	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	ʿ
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	و	w
س	s	ي	y
ش	sh	ه	h
ص	ṣ		

Long Vowels		**Short Vowels**	
ا	ā	ـَ	a
و	ū	ـُ	u
ي	ī	ـِ	i

﷾ - Free from Imperfections and Exalted is He
ﷺ - Prayers be upon him and his family
عليه السلام - Peace be upon him
عليها السلام - Peace be upon her

بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Foreword

By Sayyid Muḥammad Rizvi

THE MOST TANGIBLE OF miracles left by the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is the Qurʾan. Al-Qurʾan is the Divine revelation, which descended upon the Prophet's blessed soul in a span of twenty-two years and few months.

Muslims consider the Qurʾan as the most important document for their faith. They have given extreme importance to preserve, recite, memorize, and study the Qurʾan.

Gradually, different subjects emerged with the purpose of facilitating the process of studying the Qurʾan: *ʿIlmul Tajwīd* was devised to learn the proper recitation of the Qurʾan; *Ḥifẓ* was invented as an art of committing the Qurʾan to memory; and *ʿIlmul Tafsīr* emerged as the science of exegesis of the Qurʾan. Among these relevant subjects, *ʿUlūmul Qurʾan* flowered as a science dealing with the Qurʾan itself: the revelation and its reality; how, when and where it was revealed; how it transformed from an oral tradition to the written form; the issue of abrogation, its meaning and reality; its textual integrity and its protection from alteration; how was it complied, by whom and when. These are questions that are discussed in *ʿUlūmul Qurʾan;* and as such, it is the foundation of sciens dealing with the Qurʾan.

This brief treatise deals with an important question in *ʿUlūmul Qurʾan:* the rules governing the interpretation of the Qurʾan. It comes from the pen of Āyatullāh Shaykh Jaʿfar Subḥānī, a

leading Shīʿi scholar of Qum, who is well-known for his expertise in Qurʾanic studies and for writing a thematic exegesis of the Qurʾan.

The Qurʾan is indeed a guide for mankind, but its true interpretation depends on conditions that must be adhered to. The Qurʾan itself says that some of its verses are of an allegorical nature while others are decisive; those who intend to create confusion and mischief among the Muslims use the allegorical verses:

﴿ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَـــاتٌ هُـــنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ. فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَـــا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَآءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَآءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ. وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَـــهُ إِلاَّ اللّٰـــهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِنْ عِنْدِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلاَّ أُوْلُوا الْأَلْبَابِ ﴾

"He (Allāh) it is Who has sent down to you the Book. In it, are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is a perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except Allāh and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. They say: 'We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord.' And none will grasp the Message except the people of understanding." (Sūrat Āle ʿImrān (3), Verse 7)

Again, it warns and says that if people do not approach the Qurʾan with an open heart, then they may be misguided by some of its contents:

﴿ إِنَّ اللّٰهَ لاَ يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلاً مَا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا. فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللّٰهُ بِهٰذَا مَثَلاً. يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلاَّ الْفَاسِقِينَ ﴾

"Allāh does not disdain from the use of the similitude of things, lowest as well as highest. Those who believe know that it is the truth from their Lord; but those who reject faith say: 'What does Allāh mean by this similitude?' By it He causes many to stray, and many He leads into the right path; but He causes not to stray, except those who forsake (the path)." (Sūratul Baqarah (2), Verse 26)

Āyatullāh Subḥānī has enumerated fourteen conditions for the correct interpretation of the Qurʾanic verses. The understanding and interpretation is permissible provided it is approached with the conditions mentioned in this treatise otherwise one will be guilty of imposing one's personal opinions on the Qurʾan.

An example of absurd interpretation is Rashad Khalifa's self-styled "*Authorized English Version*" of the Qurʾan that totally ignores the context in which the Qurʾan was revealed as well as the teachings and interpretation given by the Prophet ﷺ who was the recipient, teacher, and the living embodiment of the Qurʾan.

While commenting on verse 3 of Sūratul Māidah (5) of the Qurʾan (dealing with prohibition of certain animal products such as "the meat of pigs") which reads:

﴿ حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أُهِلَّ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَالْمَوْقُوذَةُ وَالْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَالنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبُعُ إِلاَّ مَا ذَكَّيْتُمْ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى النُّصُبِ وَأَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا بِالْأَزْلاَمِ ذَٰلِكُمْ فِسْقٌ... ﴾

"Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead meat, blood, the flesh of swine and that on which has been invoked the name of other than Allāh; that which has been killed by strangling, a violent blow, a headlong fall or by being gored to death; that which has been (partly) eaten by a wild animal; unless you are able to slaughter it (in due form); that which is sacrificed on stone (altars); (forbidden) also is the division (of meat) by raffling with arrows: that is impiety..."

Khalifa writes that Allāh ﷻ has only prohibited "the meat – laḥm" of the pigs and not "the fat," and so usage of lard should be permissible. Khalifa has insisted on the literal meaning of "laḥm" to exclude the fat of the pig from this prohibition, and has totally disregarded the teaching of the recipient of the Qurʾan, Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, as accepted by Muslims for the last fourteen centuries!

Rashad Khalifa seemed to ignore the fact that the Qurʾan is not a butcher's manual where all items are spelled out precisely, for example, "lean ground beef" without the fat as opposed to "regular ground beef" with the fat!

The Qurʾan has used the term "meat/laḥm" in chapter 5, verse 3 in a general sense and not as a butcher's jargon, and it applies to any edible part of a pig.

If he had read verse 259 of Sūratul Baqarah (2), Khalifa would have seen that the term "laḥm" has been used in the Qurʾan

also in a meaning that includes the meat and the fat together. Describing His power of resurrection, Almighty Allāh ﷻ demonstrates the resurrection of a donkey that had died for a century:

﴿ ...وَانْظُرْ إِلَى الْعِظَامِ كَيْفَ نُنْشِزُهَا ثُمَّ نَكْسُوهَا لَحْمًا... ﴾

"...Look at the bones and see how We construct them, and cover them with flesh (laḥm)"

Surely Almighty Allāh ﷻ did not cover the donkey's bones with "lean" flesh without the fat, skin, etc! The word "laḥm" here applies to everything that was placed on the bones.

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I commend Shaykh Saleem Bhimji for translating this Introduction to the Tafsir of the Qurʾan, and strongly recommend it to all those who pursue the study of the Qurʾan with the intention of following its message and living by it.

9th July 2005
Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi

Biography of the Author

THE GOLDEN PAGES OF history are replete with individuals who have sacrificed their lives to play a role in the guidance and leadership of humanity. Throughout the ages, we see many scholars who have dedicated their lives to the path of progress and spiritual upliftment of mankind, one such scholar who is also one of the greatest thinkers of the Islāmic world is Āyatullāh Jaʿfar Subḥānī. Having spent every moment of his adult life in research, writing and teaching, it is through these channels that he has struggled to lift the cultural and spiritual status of humanity.

Āyatullāh Subḥānī was born on the 28th of Shawwāl, in the year 1347 AH (1926 CE) in the city of Tabrīz (Irān) into a scholarly and well-respected family. His father, the late Āyatullāh Shaykh Muḥammad Ḥusayn Subḥānī Khayābānī (1299 AH–1392 AH), was one of the outstanding scholars of Tabrīz. A scholar in his own right, he spent years in the sacred city of Najaf al-Ashraf under the guidance of Shaykh Sharīʿatul Iṣfahānī (d. 1339 AH) and Sayyid Muḥammad Kāẓim Ṭabāʾṭabāʾī (d. 1337 AH) – the author of *al-ʿUrwatul Wuthqā*. After completing his studies, he returned home to Tabrīz and spent more than fifty years teaching, writing and guiding the people and was also responsible for the training and educating of the future teachers and leaders of his community.

After completing his primary school and the introductory Islāmic studies, Āyatullāh Jaʿfar Subḥānī went on to study the books of Persian literature and grammar. Following this, at the young age of 14 (1361 AH/1940 CE) he enrolled in the Theological Seminary of Tabrīz named Ṭālibiyyah and kept himself occupied with the preliminary and secondary level of studies of Islām.

He studied the ʿArabic language under the guidance of Ḥajj Shaykh Ḥasan Naḥwī and Shaykh ʿAlī Akbar Mudarris Khayābānī - author of the book *Rayḥānatul Adab* (d. 1373 AH/ 1966 CE). These studies took him five years – until the year 1365 AH (1944 CE), after which Āyatullāh Subḥānī was able to complete the second level of theological studies and then proceed on to begin the highest level of Islāmic studies (Khārij) in Fiqh (Jurisprudence), Uṣūlul Fiqh (Principles of Jurisprudence) and Philosophy. During this period of his studies, he benefited from the knowledge of:

1. The late Āyatullāh al-ʿUẓmā al-Ḥājj Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Burūjerdī (d. 1380 AH/1959 CE)

2. The late Āyatullāh al-ʿUẓmā al-Ḥājj Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥujjat Kuhkamarī (d. 1372 AH/1951 CE)

3. The late Āyatullāh al-ʿUẓmā al-Ḥājj Sayyid Ruḥullāh Musawī Khumaynī (d. 1409 AH/1989 CE)

In the field of Philosophy, he studied the commentary of the book *Manẓūmah* and *al-Asfār* of Mullah Ṣadra and benefited from private lessons in the subject of realism under the guidance of the late ʿAllamāh Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabā'ṭabā'ī (d. 1402 AH/1982 CE).

In addition, he studied ʿIlmul Kalām under the late Sayyid Muḥammad Bādkubāʾī (d. 1390 AH/1969 CE).

Āyatullāh Subḥānī is one of those scholars who took up the pen and began to write on Islāmic topics from a very young age and since the early days, his entire life has been spent in the fields of teaching and writing. It has been noted that the first book he ever wrote, titled *The Criterion of Thinking* (concerning the science of Manṭiq - Logic) was written when he was only 17 years old!

At the age of 18, he began teaching the secondary level of Islāmic studies (Sutūḥ) and was imparting knowledge in the fields of Fiqh, Uṣūlul Fiqh, Philosophy, Ḥadīth and other subjects.

In addition, he has written notes on the lectures of Uṣūlul Fiqh which were delivered by the late Āyatullāh al-ʿUẓmā Ḥājj Sayyid Rūḥullāh Mūsawī Khumaynī which have been recently printed.

Through all of this work, he has transformed himself into a teacher who goes deep into a subject and an effective thinker such that many important tasks have been imparted upon him, including:

1. Establishing a centre for the teaching of ʿIlmul Kalām (Science of Theology) and a research library and facility for those who are conducting research in the Islāmic sciences.

2. Having written one complete topic-wise commentary of the Qurʾan (currently at fourteen volumes and available in both ʿArabic and Farsi).

3. Prepared and taught one complete course – printed in 16 volumes – in the fields of the History of Fiqh and the Fuqahā.

4. Prepared and wrote manuals for the teaching of Uṣūlul Fiqh, ʿIlmul Kalām, Ḥadīth, ʿIlmul Rijāl and the history and information on the various religions of the world and their sects and divisions.

In addition to this, he has written numerous works in Farsi – thus, the sum total of books that he has to his credit is well over 200!

The books of this author, which have been translated into English, include the following:

1. *Doctrines of Shīʿī Islām: A Compendium of Imāmi Beliefs and Practices* translated by Reza Shah-Kazemi;

2. *The Islāmic Moral System: Tafsīr of Sūratul Ḥujurāt* translated by Saleem Bhimji;

3. *The Keys to Success* translated by the Al-Qalam Translators Guild;

4. *The Message* – Biography of the Prophet Muḥammad translated by Islāmic Seminary Publications;

5. *Wahhābism* translated by Jalil Dorrani.

We pray to Allāh ﷾ to grant the author of this work the blessings to be able to continue on this path.

A Correct Approach to the Exegesis of the Qurʾan

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY OF the common era, corresponding to the fourteenth century of the Islāmic calendar, started off with an awakening of the Eastern world, especially the Muslims. In this century, the magical spell of colonialism was, to an extent, broken. Countries that had been under colonization emerged as independent or at least partially independent countries. The Muslims and their intellectual leaders began to contemplate upon a series of fundamental issues, and the reasons for the subjection and backwardness of their societies was studied and thereby, they sought to find reasons for their abject state.

Amongst the issues that drew their greater attention was the propagation of the teachings, truths, and sciences of the Qurʾan, since in the previous centuries, it was only the scholars who were benefiting from the truths of this Heavenly Book while the rest of the people were limited to the mere recitation of the scripture. The lay people expended all of their energy in the correct recitation of the Qurʾan and in learning the rules of proper pronunciation, while the books of exegesis of the Qurʾan written during those centuries were only of benefit to the scholars. Very rarely could it be seen that a scholar would sit down and write a commentary of the Qurʾan which would be for the guidance of the common people in understanding the meaning of the Qurʾan and very rarely could it be seen that they would hold classes in which the Qurʾan would be expounded upon.

It can be said that pondering and thinking upon the verses of the Qurʾan was something limited to the scholars, while the rest of the people were only to benefit from the recitation of the Qurʾan!

In addition to this frame of thought being very detrimental which is something that the scholars found out later, this belief went directly against the clear verses of the Qurʾan as the Qurʾan has invited all of humanity to think and ponder deeply on its verses and to take it as their radiant lamp (giving off Divine Celestial light) and as the best guide and leader of the Allāh-conscious (those with Taqwā).

The Qurʾan introduces itself as a "Reminder" (تَذْكِرَةٌ) and a way through which we can be informed (of previous nations, scriptures and events that have transpired). In addition, we see that those who refrain from hearing the Qurʾan and pondering upon the meaning of its verses have been severely reprimanded, as the Noble Qurʾan says:

﴿ فَمَا لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكِرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ ۝ كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُّسْتَنْفِرَةٌ ۝ فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ ﴾

"What is the matter with them that they evade the Reminder as if they were terrified donkeys fleeing from a lion?"[1]

The verses of the Qurʾan which call upon those with consciousness of Allāh (Taqwā), scholars, thinkers and intellectuals to listen and to contemplate upon the concepts presented in this Book are in such a great number that we shall refrain from quoting them or translating them or even giving their chapter and verse numbers (in this short treatise). Rather,

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[1] *Sūratul Muddathir* (74), Verses 49 to 51

we shall only present one such verse, suffice ourselves with it, and then go on to another discussion:

﴿ وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُّدَّكِرٍ ﴾

"And We have indeed made the Qurʾan easy to understand for remembrance, then is there any that will receive admonition?"[2]

This verse and other such verses of the Qurʾan tell us that understanding and making use of the Qurʾan is not limited to a select or specific group of people!

In Summary: Sidelining the masses of people (from the Qurʾan) and preventing them from benefiting from the verses of the Qurʾan which was done in the previous centuries, is something that goes directly against the words of this Heavenly Book!

Due to the aforesaid, one of the greatest changes seen at the beginning of the fourteenth Islamic century is the opening up of the gatherings of the commentary of the Qurʾan to everyone with the masses of people becoming acquainted with this Heavenly Book. In this regards, commentaries aimed at enlightening the general public have been written in the various Islāmic countries (Egypt, Syria, Irāq, Pakistan and Irān) and gatherings are held – all with the purpose of acquainting the people with the Qurʾan.

At this point, it is necessary for us to exhibit the correct way and method of pursuing a commentary of the Qurʾan so that those who have an ardent desire to understand the meanings and teachings of the Qurʾan may be able to make the best use of this Book.

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2 *Sūratul Qamar* (54), Verse 17

The commentary of the Qurʾan, in the true meaning and way in which the commentator struggles to understand the meanings of the verses of the Qurʾan – and not merely in which they simply follow those who have come before them in explaining the verses of the Qurʾan, must be carried out through employing a series of rules, realizing various conditions, and following certain issues which will be alluded to in the following pages.

1. An Awareness of the Rules of ʿArabic Grammar

The first prerequisite in the exegesis of the Qurʾan is that the commentator must have a complete knowledge of the rules of ʿArabic grammar so that under the shadow of this comprehensive knowledge, he is able to clearly differentiate the 'the subject of a verb' (ألفاعل) from the 'the object of a verb' (ألـمفعول); the 'adverb' (ألظرف) from the 'qualified verb' (ألمظروف); the 'denotative of state' (ألحل) from the 'subject of state' (ذو الحال); and the 'coupled' (ألـمعطوف) from the 'antecedent' (ألـمعطوف عليه).

However it is not only in understanding the Qurʾan for which this sort of a key is needed. Rather, in order to benefit from a book in any language, a person must possess knowledge of the rules of grammar of that particular language. How many times has it been seen that without knowing the rules of ʿArabic grammar, many errors in the understanding of the meaning of a verse of the Qurʾan take form.

This first condition is so clear that there is no need to go further in the discussion of this point.

However we should mention that being aware of the rules of ʿArabic grammar does not mean that a person must be a specialist in the rules of the sciences of: derivation, declension of words and syntax of sentences, since it is not necessary to be an expert in these fields to be a commentator of the Qurʾan.

Rather, it is sufficient that a person has a general understanding of these sciences, through which he would be able to understand and point out the various differences (in the words). Such a form of understanding (of the rules of ʿArabic grammar) can be attained by going through an entire course in the fields of the science of derivation (of the words) and the science of syntax of sentences.

2. An Awareness of the Meaning of the Words in the Qurʾan

Knowledge of the meaning of the individual words of the Qurʾan is one of the fundamental prerequisites for the commentary of the Qurʾan, since understanding compounded word is only possible after comprehending its original components.

At this point, it is imperative to note that we must never rely upon the common meaning that we perceive of a word, which is in our minds, and explain the verse according to that interpretation. How often have we seen that with the passing of time, the meaning of a word completely changes and the common definition (of a particular word) which was well known during the time of the revelation may later undergo a change. Therefore, we must go forth and study the root meaning of the word and seek to acquire its original denotation, and only then can we proceed to explain a verse of the Qurʾan.

For example the words "عصى" and "غوى", in the common understanding of today means 'he sinned' and 'he deviated', whereas the original meaning of these two words (during the time of revelation of the Qurʾan) was different from the meanings that we commonly perceive today.

We observe a group of people who prove the fallibility of the prophets by the following verse:

﴿ وَ عَصَى آدَمُ رَبَّهُ فَغَوَىٰ ﴾

"Thus did Adam distance himself from his Lord, and perform an action which had no benefit to it."[3]

They assume that the words "عصى" and "غوى" mean the same today as they did during the time of the revelation. However if the original meaning of these two words was searched out, people would definitely see that they have different (original) meanings than what is in the minds of the people today, which have been derived from the original meaning of these two words. However, the original meaning of these two words was never associated with the technical meaning of sinning!

The best book available which is able to guide us in finding the original meaning of the words contained in the Qurʾan is the work *al-Maqāyīs*, written by Aḥmad b. Fāris b. Zakariyyā (d. 395 AH). This work has been printed in six volumes in Egypt and the author's entire endeavor in compiling this work was to bring forth the original meaning of the words of the Qurʾan and to make them available to us. Then he shows to us how the meanings of the words have changed with the passing of time and have appeared in the form of an independent meaning (with a loose affiliation to the original meaning), in addition to possessing its own original meaning.

Today, in the various ʿArabic dictionaries, we see that there are some words which have ten meanings to them and a person may actually think that a particular word has actually been

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[3] *Sūrat Ṭāhā* (20), Verse 121

formed to mean all ten things and actually has ten meanings to it! However, when a person refers to the work *al-Maqāyīs*, it would then be made clear to him that the word he is studying does not have more than one meaning associated with it and all other meanings are simply different facets of the original meaning, which, due to the passage f time, have been attributed to that word and taken as independent meanings.

In addition to the book *al-Maqāyīs*, the true commentator of the Qurʾan must also refer to books such as, *al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qurʾan*, written by Abūl Qāsim Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad, popularly known as Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502 AH) and the work, *an-Nihāyah fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth wal Athar*, written by Majd ad-Dīn Abūl Saʿādāt Mubārak b. Muḥammad Jazrī, better known as Ibne Athīr (d. 606 AH) if he wants to be able to differentiate the various meanings of the words in the Qurʾan.

This last book mentioned has been printed in Egypt in six volumes and even though this work looks at the words contained in the aḥādīth, however we are able to use this work in the commentary of the Qurʾan as well.

In addition, the work *Majmaʿ al-Baḥraīn*, written by Ṭurayḥī al-Najafī (d. 1086 AH) is also a very beneficial work on the commentary of the words (contained in the Qurʾan).

3. Exegesis of the Qurʾan through the Qurʾan

With complete clarity, the Qurʾan introduces itself as the explainer of all things, when it states:

﴿ وَ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ تِبْيَاناً لِّكُلِّ شَيْءٍ ﴾

"And We have sent down The Book (Qurʾan) upon you (Muḥammad) as a clarifier of all things."[4]

If the Qurʾan is an explainer of all things, then naturally it stands to reason that it would be an explainer of itself as well. Therefore, if there is some ambiguity in one verse of the Qurʾan - and its ambiguity was for a purpose – we can resolve its ambiguity by referring to other verses which were revealed in regards to that same issue.

At this point, we present an example of this concept.

In Sūratul Shuʿarā (26), verse 173, Allāh ﷻ states the following in regards to the nation of (prophet) Lūṭ عليه السلام:

﴿ وَ أَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مَّطَراً فَسَآءَ مَطَرُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ ﴾

"And We rained down upon them a rain, and evil was the rain on those warned."

This verse gives us a glimpse of the sending down of something, however it is not clear what sort of precipitation this was – was it a spatter of water or was it a raining down of stones? Therefore to clear this issue up, another verse of the Qurʾan, which removes the ambiguity of the verse quoted above, is referred to in which we are told:

﴿ ...وَ أَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حِجَارَةً مِّنْ سِجِّيلٍ... ﴾

"...and We rained down upon them stones made from baked clay..."[5]

[4] *Sūratul Naḥl* (16), Verse 89

[5] *Sūratul Ḥijr* (15), Verse 74

The word "حِجَارَةٌ" (stones) is the word, which clears up the ambiguity in the first verse.

In order for us to truly comprehend this third point, we present another example.

In one instance in the Qurʾan, we read the following:

﴿ هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلاَّ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلَلٍ مِنَ الْغَمَامِ وَالْمَلائِكَةُ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴾

"Will they wait until Allāh comes to them in canopies of clouds, with Angels (in His train) and the question is (thus) settled? But to Allāh do all affairs go back (for decision)."[6]

The apparent reading of this verse shows us that it is not free of ambiguity, since the coming and going of an object are characteristics for a physical entity and we know that the sacred essence of Allāh ﷻ is free from being a physical body. Thus, we must seek to remove the vagueness, which is contained in this verse through some other means.

One such way is to carefully review other similar verses of the Qurʾan which repeat the same or close to the same wordings as this verse.

Such a similar verse is in Sūratul Naḥl (16), verse 33, which contains approximately the same wording. This other verse clearly shows us that the meaning of the 'coming of the Lord' as actually referring to the coming of 'the commandments' of Allāh ﷻ for the punishment and retribution and (also) the orders and prohibitions from Him:

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[6] *Sūratul Baqarah* (2), Verse 210

﴿ هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلاَّ أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْمَلاَئِكَةُ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ كَذٰلِكَ فَعَلَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللّٰهُ وَلٰكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴾

"Do they wait until the Angels come to them, or there comes the Command of your Lord (for their doom)? So did those who went before them (also wait). But Allāh wronged them not, no, they wronged their own souls!"

With complete explicitness, this verse removes any ambiguity present in the first verse, and by adding the word "أمر" (the Command of Allāh ﷻ) the true subject of the verb 'come', is made clear.

This form of explanation (tafsīr of one Qurʾanic verse by another verse) is a certain and unfailing method, and is the tradition of the Imāms of the Shīʿa and is something which even until now is employed by the erudite commentator of the Qurʾan.

The commentary of the Qurʾan by the great teacher, Āqā [Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn] Ṭabāṭabāʼī entitled, *al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾan*, has been written following this particular method of commentary.

Of course this issue is something different than the issue of 'looking at the harmony which exists between the verses of the Qurʾan', which we shall cover in detail later on in this discussion.

At this stage, the goal is merely to present the synoptic view of a verse through employing another verse. However at the next level, our goal is something different and thus at that stage, in order to reach to our own deduction of understanding a verse, we must not keep other verses of the Qurʾan out of our

attention [and only look at one verse without paying attention to other verses on the same topic].

It is incorrect to assume that if a verse's apparent meaning is devoid of any ambiguity, one can interpret it without taking into regard those verses of the same issue and then attribute that meaning to Allāh ﷻ!

With that said, the difference between these two forms of commentary of the Qurʾan should be clear to the reader.

4. Examining the Occasion of Revelation of the Verses

The Noble Qurʾan was revealed over the span of twenty-three years, following a chain of questions and answers [from the people] or with various events and incidents taking place.

Having knowledge of the history of revelation of the verses offers us a clearer understanding of the meaning of each verse. However, this does not mean that without knowing the history of revelation we are unable to go forth and explain the Qurʾan. Rather, since the verses of the Qurʾan are a source of guidance, clear proofs, and the distinguisher between right and wrong, just as we are told that:

﴿ ...هُدىً لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ... ﴾

"...(this Qurʾan is a) guide to mankind, and also clear (Signs) for guidance and judgement (between right and wrong)..."[7]

and:

﴿ ...وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ نُوراً مُّبِيناً... ﴾

[7] *Sūratul Baqarah* (2), Verse 185

"...and We have sent down to you the manifest light (the Noble Qur᾽an)..."[8]

thus naturally, this is exactly what has been meant and even without referring to the history of revelation of the verses, we are able to clearly understand their meaning.

However, with shifting our attention to the history of revelation of the verses, their meaning will become clearer and even more manifest.

At this point, we present an example that proves what we have just stated.

It is mentioned in Sūratul Tawbah (9) that:

﴿ وَعَلىٰ الثَّلاثَةِ الَّذِينَ خُلِّفُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا ضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَرْضُ بِمَا رَحُبَتْ وَضَاقَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ وَظَنُّوا أَنْ لاَّ مَلْجَأَ مِنَ اللّٰهِ إِلاَّ إِلَيْهِ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَتُوبُوا إِنَّ اللّٰهَ هُوَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴾

"(He - Allāh - turned in mercy also) to the three who were left behind; (they felt guilty) to such a degree that the Earth seemed constrained to them for all its spaciousness, and their souls seemed straitened to them, and they perceived that there is no fleeing from Allāh (and no refuge), but to Him. Then He turned to them that they might repent, for Allāh is Oft-Returning, the Most Merciful."[9]

There is no doubt that the meaning of the verse is clear, however a person would definitely have, in regards to the

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[8] *Sūratul Nisā* (4), Verse 174

[9] *Sūratul Tawbah* (9), Verse 118

(deeper) meaning of this verse, the desire to know the following things:

1. Who are the three people referred to in this verse?
2. Why were they left behind?
3. How did the Earth become constrained for them?
4. How did their chests become straitened in regards to the life of this world and how did their souls face pressure?
5. How did they realize that other than Allāh ﷻ, there is no other source of refuge?
6. What is the meaning of the ability or opportunity given by Allāh ﷻ to humans *(Tawfīq)* in relation to these people?

The answers to each of these questions can easily be achieved by referring to the history of revelation of this verse.

At this stage, it would not be out of place to remind ourselves of the following point which is that any narration which details the history of revelation of a particular verse of the Qurʾan can not automatically be accepted. Rather, in regards to the trustworthiness of a tradition which contains the history of revelation (of a verse), there must be some measurements in place through which, the correct and incorrect narrations can be weighed. This is especially true when it comes to the history of revelation of the verses of the Qurʾan which relate the stories of the previous prophets and the past generations of people as in this area of review, precaution must not be neglected as many of the narrations which discuss the history of revelation (of these types of instances) have been related from unknown and unfamiliar sources and as we know, we can never (blindly) accept historical narrations from such sources.

Unfortunately, many of the commentaries of the Qurʾan do not take this point into consideration and therefore, some

commentators have gone forth to relate any narration which accounts the history of revelation – even from people who are not trustworthy or reliable!

5. Examining the Authentic Aḥādīth

Some of the verses of the Qurʾan pertain to Islāmic law and jurisprudence. They talk about the acts and deeds of those obligated to observe the Islamic laws and explain their rulings.

The number of such verses in the Qurʾan are not few and some scholars enumerate such verses as being around five hundred! Although the actual number of such verses is fewer than this, however benefiting from them, without referring to the relevant authentic Islāmic traditions is incorrect. This is because a majority of these are either general guidelines whose conditions and restrictions have been mentioned in the traditions of the Noble Prophet ﷺ and his Infallible Successors عليهم السلام or are universal laws whose exceptions were later explained by the sunnah of the Noble Prophet ﷺ. It goes without saying that establishing a law by the absoluteness of the absolute form or the universality of the universal without referring to the limitations and exceptions is incorrect.

In order for this issue to be clear in the minds of the readers, we present the following examples.

1. There are issues in the Noble Qurʾan, for which there can be found no explanation save in the Islāmic aḥādīth and the conduct of the early Muslims. For example, the Qurʾan has made ṣalāt, ṣawm, zakāt, khums, and ḥajj obligatory, while it has given no details about them. Thus, we have no choice but to seek the details of these general acts from the Islāmic aḥādīth and the conduct of the early Muslims. Hence without referring to these sources, any other kind of commentary and explanation about them would be equal to aspiring for the

impossible. In explaining such verses, the method adopted by all the Muslims of the world from the early days of Islām until today has been the same [i.e. referring to the relevant authentic aḥādīth and the way of life of the Muslims].

2. In the Noble Qurʾan there are general and absolute laws whose exceptions and limitations appear only in the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and the traditions of the Infallible Imāms عليهم السلام.

This custom of not incorporating notes alongside laws is not restricted to the Qurʾan. Rather, even legislative bodies of the world follow the same method: over a period of time in implementing the laws of a country, points of enlightenment and exceptions are incorporated into the laws. The difference however between the Qurʾan and man made laws is that whereas the reason in separating the points of enlightenment from the original law in the case of the latter is the limitation of human awareness which requires annotations, exceptions and additions over time. In the Divine legal system, such limitation does not arise, and all the details of a law - whether those which are to be outdated or added in the future - are clear for a Law Maker like Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. Nevertheless sometimes social interests necessitate that the specifics of the laws be expounded gradually, and not all at one place.

For example, the Qurʾan has prohibited the taking of interest and has stated:

﴿ ...وَ حَرَّمَ الرِّبٰوا... ﴾

"And He (Allāh) has prohibited interest."[10]

[10] *Sūratul Baqarah* (2), Verse 275

However, in the aḥādīth, we observe that in some circumstances, interest is permissible. For example: interest between a father and son or a husband and wife, and the benefits of such exceptions are completely clear, for in these examples, due to the uniformity of the kitty and the close relationship of both parties, interest does not bear an oppressive color and has thus been designated as lawful.

According to the verse of the Qurʾan which reads:

﴿ وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا ﴾

"...whatever the Prophet gives to you, take it; and whatever he forbids you from, stay away from it..."[11]

we Muslims must adopt all the commandments which have come from the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ and distance ourselves from all the things which he has forbidden us from doing.

Thus, if a commentator of the Qurʾan wants to explain such verses of the Qurʾan – whose number is not small – and was to rely solely on the verses of the Qurʾan, and was to abstain from referring to the aḥādīth, then he would have acted against the verse of the Qurʾan quoted above and in essence, would have neglected this verse of the Qurʾan!

The need to explain and elucidate some of the verses of the Qurʾan which deal with the practical laws of Islām (whether the general import of their meanings such as ṣalāt, zakāt, etc. or exceptions and limitations, i.e. the points of enlightenment and exceptions in law) by way of the sunnah and aḥādīth, led the Fuqahā (Jurisprudents) to expound such verses separately, and write books that specifically concern such kind of verses. The

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[11] *Sūratul Ḥashr* (59), Verse 7

best works and exegeses of this nature on the *āyāt al-āḥkām* are of al-Jaṣṣāṣ, Fāḍil al-Miqdād, Muḥaqqiq Ardibilī and al-Jazāirī.

In order for the esteemed reader to develop a greater understanding of this kind of exegesis, we present two other examples:

3. The Qurʾan unconditionally permits any form of transaction and respects all forms of contracts, promises and pacts and considers it mandatory to act according to them. However, the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and the aḥādīth – which are respected by all Muslims – proclaim some kinds of transactions as incorrect. For example, the buying and selling of instruments of gambling and intoxicant liquids, sales in transactions of munābadhah[12] and the like, of which, all their details have been mentioned in the aḥādīth.

Therefore, expounding the verse of the Qurʾan which reads:

﴿ ...وَأَحَلَّ اللّٰهُ الْبَـــــيْعَ... ﴾

"...And Allāh has made business transactions permissible..."[13]

without referring to these traditions would be incorrect and baseless.

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[12] The following is an example of a *munābadhah* transaction: The buyer agrees with the seller: (*in nabadhtahu ilayya, faqad ishtaraytuhu bikdhā* (If you throw the commodity to me, it means that I have already bought it for such and such amount.) (al-ʿAllāmah al-Ḥillī, *Taḥrīr al-Aḥkām*, v.2, p. 256). We must realize that according to some experts in Islāmic law, not all kinds of transactions which taken place in this form are invalid. There are some specific extensions, which come under the valid transactions. (Ed.)

[13] *Sūratul Baqarah* (2), Verse 275

Likewise is the case with the verse that reads:

﴾ ...أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ ﴿

"...Be truthful to all of your promises."[14]

Without referring to the aḥādīth which proclaim some conditions and pacts as futile and invalid, it would be incorrect to explain the verse.

For example the phrase of the aḥādīth which states:

إِلاَّ شَرْطاً أَحَلَّ حَرَاماً وَحَرَّمَ حَلاَلاً.

"(Respect all conditions) except a condition which makes a forbidden act lawful and a lawful act impermissible."

no longer allows us to adhere to the absolute meaning of the verse.

Testimonies of the Qurʾan

The issue which has just been mentioned is a tangible reality which every exegete of the Qurʾan is able to appreciate from up close. In addition, it satisfies every realistic person as well. Besides, the Qurʾan clearly bears witness that it requires the exposition of the Noble Prophet ﷺ, who apart from reading it to the people, is also obliged to expound its meanings.

At this point, we bring forth some examples from the Qurʾan, but will not go into detail in explaining them:

1. The first example is seen in the following verse:

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[14] *Sūratul Māʾidah* (5), Verse 1

﴿ وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴾

"And We have sent down to you (Muḥammad) The Reminder so that you may explain to mankind that which has been sent to them so that perhaps they may ponder and think upon it."[15]

This verse can only imply what we are trying to establish when we understand that the Prophet's ﷺ duty has been expounded by the words "لِتُبَيِّنَ" (so that you may expound) which is different from the phrase "لِتَقْرَأَ" (so that you may recite).

In other words the Prophet ﷺ was commissioned to undertake two responsibilities:

a. Recitation of the verses of the Qurʾan;

b. Explaining the verses of the Qurʾan and elucidating its meanings. It should be known that this verse and its likes do not pertain to all the verses of the Qurʾan, but verses whose meaning and details are impossible to know without an exposition from the Noble Prophet ﷺ and his successors عليهم السلام. Examples of these are the ambiguous verses of Islāmic law or verses that require enlightenment and exceptions.

2. The second example is seen in the following verse:

﴿ لاَ تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ ۝ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ ۝ فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ ۝ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ ﴾

"Do not move your tongue (Muḥammad) to make haste with it (the recitation of the Qurʾan). Surely upon Us lies the

[15] *Sūratul Naḥl* (16), Verse 44

responsibility of collecting it and the reciting of it (the Qurʾan). Therefore, when We have recited it, follow its recitation. Again on Us (devolves) the explaining of it (the Qurʾan)."[16]

In this verse of the Qurʾan, we see that Allāh ﷻ has taken three responsibilities upon Himself:

a. Recitation of the Qurʾan;

b. Collection of the verses of the Qurʾan;

c. Explanation of the meaning of the verses of the Qurʾan. It goes without saying that expounding the meaning of the Qurʾan to the Prophet ﷺ is only possible through Divine Revelation (Waḥī) whereas the people are never directly addressed by Divine Revelation. The Divine Revelation on the Prophet ﷺ is either depicted in the Qurʾan or the sunnah of the Noble Prophet ﷺ.

Therefore, in explaining the meanings of the verses of the Qurʾan, one must refer to both of these sources (the Qurʾan and the aḥādīth of the Prophet ﷺ and his successors عليهم السلام) and we must never suffice with just one of them.

In other words: In this verse, Allāh ﷻ prohibits the Prophet ﷺ from hasty recitation; thereafter He takes the responsibility from the Prophet ﷺ for the acts of collecting and reciting the verses and orders the Prophet ﷺ to follow the Angel in recitation. Finally He (also) takes the responsibility of expounding and elucidating the contents, as the following phrase of the verse clearly reveals:

﴿ ثُمَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ ﴾

"Again on Us (devolves) the explaining of it (the Qurʾan)."

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[16] *Sūratul Qiyāmat* (75), Verses 16 to 19

Here, what is the actual meaning of the exposition that Allāh ﷻ takes responsibility of? We should not conjecture that it refers to the exposition of defining the words of the verses, for this has already been mentioned previously in the phrase:

﴿ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْأَنَهُ ﴾

"Surely upon Us is the responsibility of collecting it and the reciting of it (the Qurʾan)."

Hence, there is no need for repetition of the same. Certainly, it refers to the exposition of those verses that require exposition from Allah ﷻ, and His Messenger ﷺ and his true successors عليهم السلام, after having received the same through Revelation (Waḥī) which they then hand over to the nation.

It should be known however that the aim is not that every verse of the Noble Qurʾan needs exposition so that someone should say that the following verse too needs exposition:

﴿ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴾

"Surely Allāh has power over all things."

Rather, the purpose is that in order to be generally acquainted with the meaning of the Qurʾan, we need an exposition of the Revelation. However at the moment, our discussion does not concern the quantitative dimension of such necessity.

Obviously, just as we had mentioned in regards to referring to the occasion of the revelation of the verses, one must not undertake to explain the Qurʾan with any report or ḥadīth. Rather, each tradition must be carefully reviewed from the point of view of its chain of narrators and contents, and (only) after ascertaining that it contains all the necessary conditions of reliability, can one seek assistance from it.

6. A Consideration of the Harmony between all the Verses of the Qurʾan[17]

What has been mentioned so far makes up the primary foundation of Qurʾanic exegesis. However, one of the important conditions for the correctness of tafsīr and its strength is that the commentator must not consider each verse of a particular sūrah as being separate from the other verses of the same sūrah as well as the verses of all other chapters of the Qurʾan. The commentator must realize that all the verses have either a single goal behind them, or multiple goals, all of which can be summarized in one extensive goal.

The greatest stumbling block in the commentary of the Qurʾan lies in this stage meaning that a person, due to his mere knowledge of the rules of ʿArabic grammar, goes forth to offer a commentary of a verse of the Qurʾan, neglecting other similar verses revealed about the same issue. It was this very blunder in exegesis that resulted in the formation of different Islāmic sects and ideologies, and every creed and founder of a new sect, in order to establish his ideology, brought proof and testimony from the Qurʾan!

Who does not know that all of the different schools of Islāmic thought, whether the Mujabbirah[18], the Muʿtazilah[19], the

[17] It should be noted that 'referring to the harmony in the sum of verses of the Qurʾān' is something other than the commentary of one verse (of the Qurʾān) through employing another verse (of the Qurʾan) which was mentioned in the third condition given above for which, the difference is extremely clear.

[18] This school of thought believes that man has no freedom and is merely a tool in the hands of Allāh ﷻ. (Tr.)

[19] They believe that man is totally free and Allāh ﷻ exercises no power over his action. (Tr.)

Mushabbihah[20], the Mujassimah[21], the Murjiʿah[22], or the other proponents of ideologies and sects based their theoretical beliefs upon various verses of the Qurʾan and considered themselves to be among the followers of the Qurʾan! This is while, save for one, all other creeds are false and are distanced from the guidance of the Qurʾan.

When we search for the root cause of the emergence of these sects, we observe that the reason, or at least one of the reasons for them coming about is that each sect attached itself to a specific verse and was negligent of the other verses that spoke of the same subject which could have served as an exposition to first the verse.

There is no doubt that the Qurʾan contains numerous verses, which if taken and studied on their own, may make one reach various (incorrect) conclusions such as that of the beliefs of: predestination, free-will, likening Allāh ﷻ to His creations, tanzīh[23], belief in Allāh ﷻ having a body, etc. However, one can

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[20] The anthropomorphists [Gr.,=having human form]. This term refers to those who believed in the Divine having a human form or having human characteristics. (Tr.)

[21] Corporealists. (Tr.)

[22] They were of the view that faith and belief are sufficient for salvation and good deeds are not necessary. (Tr.)

[23] Tanzih or 'Deanthropomorphism' literally refers to the belief of, "ridding of philosophy or religion of anthropomorphic beliefs and doctrines." However, this belief becomes misleading when one disregards every perfect trait that the human being possesses and believes that Allāh ﷻ is free from the perfect attributes. This is incorrect, for Allāh ﷻ possesses all of the perfect attributes but in the infinite and absolute form. Thus, for example, we cannot say that Allāh ﷻ has no mercy because man has mercy, but rather that 'Allāh has mercy, but in the Absolute sense.' His mercy, unlike human mercy, does not follow the state of pity, which is "a state of change". [Tr.]

never state that all of these contrary and opposite beliefs and ideologies stem directly from the Divine Revelation (waḥī) and that all of these make up the actual goals and objectives which the Qurʾan has put forward, since the Qurʾan clearly states that:

﴿ وَلَوْ كَانَ مِنْ عِنْدِ غَيْرِ اللّٰهِ لَوَجَدُوا فِيهِ اخْتِلاَفاً كَثِيراً ﴾

"And had this (Qurʾan) come from any other than Allāh then surely you would have found numerous discrepancies within it."[24]

This confusion can also be cleared up if we do not forget the unity and harmony which exists amongst the verses of the Qurʾan.

In addition, we must keep in mind that the Qurʾan has been described as possessing the following two characteristics:

a. Verses which are similar to one another;

b. Often repeated – from the point of view of their content (not necessarily repeated verbatim).

This is clearly seen in a verse of the Qurʾan in which it is stated:

﴿ أَللّٰهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَاباً مُّتَشَابِهاً مَّثَانِيَ ﴾

"Allāh has revealed the best of discourses in the form of a Book, consistent with itself, (yet) repeating (its teachings in various aspects)."[25]

Naturally, one thing may resemble something else and whereas it is possible that they may differ in some regards and aspects, however without doubt they would also have points of

[24] *Sūratul Nisā* (4), Verse 82

[25] *Sūratul Zumur* (39), Verse 23

conformity and commonality amongst them and it is for this reason that they are referred to as being similar to one another. Therefore, in explaining one verse of the Qurʾan, one must refer to all of the other verses which have been revealed in the same regard. At this point, from the collection of all the verses, a final opinion would be concluded, and this is how one should carry on the entire process of commentary of the Qurʾan.

It is at this point that the necessity to search for another form of commentary of the Qurʾan which is known as the 'thematic exegesis' of the Qurʾan becomes obvious. The methodology used in such a commentary of the Qurʾan is that all of the verses on a particular theme are – as much as is humanly possible – gathered together, and then at that point, one keeps in mind the context of each verse and compares one verse to another. From this overall review, one outcome is extracted.

The other form of exegesis of the Qurʾan, meaning the explanation of the verses of the Qurʾan in sequential order – chapter by chapter – is no doubt beneficial and very valuable, even for a select group of people and there is no other method of commentary of the Qurʾan which would be as fruitful. Unfortunately however, the only way to remove the curtains which may cloud over the true goals and aims of the verses of the Qurʾan is through the thematic exegesis of the Qurʾan, as this is the true soul and essence of seeing the harmony in verses of the Qurʾan. In addition, this is the same path which has been taken by the author of this (present) work in compiling, *Manshūr-e-Jāwīd-e-Qurʾan* - "The Everlasting Charter of the Qurʾan"[26] and the work, *Mafāhimul Qurʾan* - "The

[26] The thematic exegesis of the Qurʾān written in Farsi. Fourteen volumes have been published to date.

Understandings of the Qurʾan”[27]. Of course it goes without saying that these works of ours are not free from flaws and defects, and those who shall come in the future will complete and perfect this form of exegesis of the Qurʾan, God willing.

7. Examining the Context of the Verses of the Qurʾan

Paying attention to the context of the verses, that is which comes before and after a particular verse (which we wish to comment upon) is in some ways, a branch of the sixth prerequisite of tafsīr – consideration of the harmony that exists in all the verses of the Qurʾan.

For example, we know that the Qurʾan speaks about various issues and brings forth numerous verses in regards to a specific topic. In such an instance, referring to only one verse and neglecting the other verses would not result in anything but inexactitude and distancing oneself from the true goal of this Noble Book.

However it is not only the Qurʾan which, in trying to comprehend its sentences, must be understood and explained by seeing everything which comes before and after a particular verse. Rather, in order to explain the words of any wise person, this method (which is currently being discussed) must be employed.

In order for this discussion to be clear in the minds, we present the following examples:

In Sūratul Aʿrāf (7), verse 35, Allāh ﷻ says:

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[27] The thematic exegesis of the Qurʾān written in ʿArabic. Seven volumes have been published to date. This work can be read in its entirety at **www.imamsadeq.org.**

﴿ يَا بَـــــنِي آدَمَ إِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنْكُمْ يَقُصُّونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَـــاتِي فَمَنِ اتَّـــــقَىٰ وَأَصْلَحَ فَلاَ خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلاَ هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴾

"O children of Ādam! If there come to you Messengers from among yourselves, relating My communications to you, then whoever shall guard (against evil) and act aright, they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve."[28]

In explaining this verse of the Qurʾan, if we abstain from referring to that which came before and after it and simply take the verse on its own, then its meaning would be that the Qurʾan has kept the door open for other prophets to come after the Noble Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and has not shut the door of prophethood. However we know that in another verse of the Qurʾan, it is stated that Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ is the final and seal of all the prophets (and none shall come after him) just as we read:

﴿ مَا كَانَ مُحَمَّدٌ أَبَا أَحَدٍ مِّنْ رِجَالِكُمْ وَلٰكِنْ رَّسُولَ اللّٰهِ وَخَـــاتَمَ النَّـــبِـــيِّـــينَ وَكَانَ اللّٰهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيماً ﴾

"Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men, but he is the Messenger of Allāh and the last (and seal) of the prophets, and Allāh is cognizant of all things."[29]

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[28] The ʿArabic word, 'إِمَّا' mentioned in this verse was originally two words – 'إِنْ' and 'مَا' however since the area of pronunciation of these two words is very similar in the ʿArabic language, the letter 'ن' was merged with the letter 'م'. In reality, the word 'إِمَّا' is actually in the meaning of a 'condition' and thus, the meaning of this verse becomes, "Surely IF messengers come to you..."

[29] *Sūratul Aḥzāb* (33), Verse 40

The root of these two opposite conclusions is that in the commentary of the first verse mentioned, there was no attention paid to the context of the verse and it was reviewed without keeping in mind the commentary of the verses that came before or after it. However, if one simply refers to the Qurʾan itself, they would have seen that this verse is only one section of a collection of twenty-six verses (verses eleven to thirty-six) of Sūratul Aʿrāf (7) which elucidate upon an event that took place at the beginning of the creation of humanity. Thus, we see that these verses are in regards to the time period of the creation of Ādam عليه السلام, his being removed from Paradise and being ordered to live on the Earth along with his wife and children.

In such an instance in time (when this was happening), Allāh سبحانه وتعالى addressed the sons of Ādam عليه السلام and told them, "O' children of Ādam! If a prophet comes to you, then whosoever of you displays consciousness (Taqwā) of Allāh and chooses the path of righteousness shall have no fear or grief!"

There is no doubt that after Ādam عليه السلام settled down on Earth, countless prophets came from Allāh سبحانه وتعالى to guide mankind and all of their missions were one and the same:

﴿ فَمَنِ اتَّقَىٰ وَأَصْلَحَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴾

"...then whoever shall guard (against evil) and act aright, they shall have no fear nor shall they grieve."

Such an address (by Allāh سبحانه وتعالى) which took shape at the beginning of creation does not prevent us from accepting the fact that our Prophet (Muḥammad ﷺ) is the final prophet and it is through him that the door of Propethood, which up until the point in time (of him coming) had been open for so many years, was shut to humanity for various reasons.

Thus in summary: In this instance, the Qurʾan is addressing a specific period and is relating an incident to us. However this does not mean that this is something that would take shape after the revelation of this verse that is being reported about (that another prophet would come).

This reality only becomes apparent when we know that the collection of twenty-six verses (verses 11 to 36) of the Qurʾan in Sūratul Aʿrāf (7) are directly addressing the (actual) children of Ādam ﵇ as is seen when they are directly spoken to three times by the phrase, "O' Children of Ādam!" (يا بني آدم) as can be seen in the verses below:

﴿ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاساً... ﴾

"O' Children of Ādam! Surely we have sent down to you clothing..."[30]

﴿ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ لاَ يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ كَمَا أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُمْ... ﴾

"O' Children of Ādam! Do not let Satan test you as He ousted your parents..."[31]

﴿ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ إِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنْكُمْ... ﴾

"O' Children of Ādam! If there come to you Messengers from among yourselves..."[32]

[30] *Sūratul Aʿrāf* (7), Verse 26

[31] Ibid., Verse 27

[32] Ibid., Verse 35

In another instance in which the Qurʾan speaks about the beginning of creation, we see the same wordings being used, such as in the following example:

﴿ أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَــــنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لاَّ تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ... ﴾

"Did I not take a covenant from you, O children of Ādam that you should not serve Satan?"[33]

This form of addressing (by Allāh ﷻ) is related to the period of the beginning of creation and is in accordance with that occasion and is not in reference to the time of the Noble Prophet of Islām ﷺ.

With this explanation, it becomes clear that the address in the verse under review is among the first Divine addresses at the time of the beginning of creation. Thus, there is no substance in relating them to the issue of the finality of prophethood and the source of this error in judgment is due to not paying attention to the context of the verses.

A Consideration of the Context of the Verses and the Successively Narrated Aḥādīth

Even though referring to that which comes before and after a particular verse (in understanding its true meaning) is one of the keys for a correct and accurate exegesis of the Qurʾan, unfortunately, the context of the verse is effectual only when the verse under review is not proven to be independent of the verses which came before and after it. When it is proven to be independent of the verses around it, then we cannot refer to the context of the verses in order to explain and comment upon it.

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[33] *Sūrat Yāsīn* (36), Verse 60

A study of the verses of the Qurʾan confirms the fact that sometimes (and we stress on the word sometimes) before the Qurʾan finishes speaking about a particular topic, it may bring a new theme into the discussion. Then when it finishes with that topic, it would revert to the original theme of discussion and this is one of specialties of the Qurʾan. This is the same thing that is more or less, seen in the words of eloquent and articulate speakers as well.

Of course, our purpose in stating this is not to say that in the Qurʾan, within the confines of a particular discussion, another topic is brought up which has absolutely no relevance or bearing to the original discussion. Technically speaking, we do not wish to state that one verse that is built upon a specific theme and issue is mixed in with other verses that are related to other topics and themes and intrudes or interrupts the flow of verses. Rather, our meaning here is that at the same time that it safeguards the perspective of the verses, before concluding a topic within the initial discussion, a new topic is also introduced and the first topic is then completed in the (remaining) verses.

Examples of this Issue

In Sūratul Baqarah (2) in verses 221 to 240, the Qurʾan brings forth issues related to husband, wife, children, the issues of divorce and the death of the husband. The entire collection of verses of this section is completely in unity and harmony with one another.

However, after verse 237, in verses 238 and 239 we see that the issue of protecting the ṣalāt, especially the 'middle' ṣalāt has been mentioned and the performance of the ṣalāt in the state of jihād has also been brought up. After this, we see that the verses then revert to the initial topic (of marriage and family

life). Thus, what is the suitability for these two verses to come up in the middle of the discussion on family issues? At present, this is not our discussion however this is something that we are able to perceive by reviewing these verses.

Nevertheless, at this point, in order for this issue to be understandable for the readers, we bring forth these verses of the Qurʾan:

﴿ وَإِنْ طَلَّقْتُمُوهُنَّ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَمَسُّوهُنَّ وَقَدْ فَرَضْتُمْ لَهُنَّ فَرِيضَةً فَنِصْفُ مَا فَرَضْتُمْ إِلاَّ أَنْ يَعْفُونَ أَوْ يَعْفُوَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ عُقْدَةُ النِّكَاحِ وَأَنْ تَعْفُوا أَقْرَبُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ وَلاَ تَنْسَوُا الْفَضْلَ بَيْنَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ۝ حَافِظُوا عَلَى الصَّلَوَاتِ وَالصَّلاَةِ الْوُسْطَىٰ وَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ قَانِتِينَ ۝ فَإِنْ خِفْتُمْ فَرِجَالاً أَوْ رُكْبَاناً فَإِذَا أَمِنْتُمْ فَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَمَا عَلَّمَكُمْ مَا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ ۝ وَالَّذِينَ يُتَوَفَّوْنَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَذَرُونَ أَزْوَاجاً وَصِيَّةً لِأَزْوَاجِهِمْ مَتَاعاً إِلَى الْحَوْلِ غَيْرَ إِخْرَاجٍ فَإِنْ خَرَجْنَ فَلاَ جُنَاحَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي مَا فَعَلْنَ فِي أَنْفُسِهِنَّ مِنْ مَعْرُوفٍ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ ﴾

"And if you divorce them (women) before you have touched them (had sexual relations with them) and you have appointed for them a portion (dowry), then (pay to them) half of what you have appointed, unless they relinquish or he should relinquish in whose hand is the marriage tie; and it is nearer to righteousness that you should relinquish; and do not neglect the giving of free gifts between yourselves; surely Allāh sees what you do. Attend constantly to prayers and to the middle prayer and stand up truly obedient to Allāh. But if you are in

danger, then (say your prayers) on foot or on horseback; and when you are secure, then remember Allāh as He has taught you what you did not know. And those of you who die and leave wives behind, (make) a bequest in favour of your wives of maintenance for a year without turning (them) out, then if they themselves go away, there is no blame on you for what they do of lawful deeds by themselves, and Allāh is Mighty, Wise."[34]

As can be seen in these verses, the first and last past of this section are in regards to the issue of marriage and relations while the verses in the middle are in regards to protecting the ṣalāt – with special emphasis on the middle ṣalāt and the ṣalāt at the time of fear (such as war or from an enemy, etc.).

Therefore, whenever clear and unambiguous proofs such as a successively narrated ḥadīth (mutawātir) or a ḥadīth which accompanies hints that necessitate knowledge of the content of the tradition contradict the context of the verses, then we must act according to the conclusion which we have reached from the aḥādīth. Thus, in such an instance, we must not regard the context of the verses of the Qurʾan, but rather focus our attention on the correct aḥādīth.

We present the following two examples to further elucidate this issue:

a. In Sūratul Aḥzāb (33), from verses 28 to 35, the Qurʾan discusses the wives of the Noble Prophet of Islām ﷺ. However in verse 33, we see the following sentence:

﴿ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا ﴾

[34] *Sūratul Baqarah* (2), Verse 237 to 240

"Surely Allāh wishes to remove all forms of impurity from you, Ahlul Bayt, and to purify you with a thorough purification."[35]

The context of the verses before and after would tell us that this verse is related directly to the wives of the Noble Prophet of Islām ﷺ. However, the successively narrated aḥādīth which have come to us from both sides (the Shīʿa and the Ahlus Sunnah) tell us that this verse was revealed in regards to a specific group of people who have been beautified with the adornment of infallibility. Thus in this instance, the undeniable aḥādīth take precedence over the context of this verse.

Other than this, there is even clear proof in the verse itself to prove that this part of the verse is not in regards to the wives of the Prophet of Islām ﷺ. These two proofs are the masculine pronoun used in the word "عَنْكُمْ" and "يُطَهِّرَكُمْ" which announce to us that there is no relationship between this part of the verse and that which has come before it in regards to the wives of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.[36]

Then, why has the purity and infallibility of the Ahlul Bayt عليهم السلام been mentioned within the discussion concerning the wives of the Prophet of Islām ﷺ? This is not part of our discussion here and thus we leave it at that.

b. In Sūratul Māʾidah (5), from verses 1 to 5, the Qurʾan speaks in a particular way about meat and other issues regarding food. However in the middle of the third verse, we read:

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[35] *Sūratul Aḥzāb* (33), Verse 33

[36] In our work, *Mafāhimul Qurʾān*, vol. 5, and *The Third Path*, we have discussed this verse in great detail and have proven, through using the undeniable proofs that the meaning of Ahlul Bayt عليهم السلام is reserved for a specific group of people who were clearly identified by the Noble Prophet of Islām ﷺ.

﴿ أَلْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتْمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلاَمَ دِيناً ﴾

"On this day, I have perfected your religion for you and have completed My bounties upon you and have been pleased to choose Islām as your religion."[37]

The rule of reviewing the context of the verses of the Qurʾan, commands us to accept that the part of the verse quoted above is in regards to the day when various things were forbidden for consumption such as the animal which has died on its own, blood, the flesh of swine and other things. Thus, the meaning of 'this day' (أليوم) as mentioned in this part of the verse is the day when these things were made prohibited for human consumption. However the clear and unambiguous proofs and the successively narrated aḥādīth state that this part of the verse was not revealed in regards to the prohibition of various types of meat. Rather, we are told that this part of the verse was revealed in regards to the Day of Ghadīr [18th of Dhul Ḥijjah] – the day when the faith and teachings of Islām were perfected and completed through the designation of the leader of the community [after the Prophet of Islām ﷺ - that being Imām ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib عليه السلام.]

Thus, the commentator of the Qurʾan who is seeking to display the realities (of the Qurʾan) must refrain from explaining the verse according to the context of that which has come before and after it and must instead refer to the definite aḥādīth in this regard.

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[37] *Sūratul Māʾidah* (5), Verse 3

In this issue, there are many more examples which we can bring to act as proofs for our statements, however in order to keep this discussion brief, we shall not mention them here.

8. Awareness of the Various Viewpoints and Opinions

Being fully aware of the various viewpoints and opinions of Muslim commentators on the Qurʾan who have spent their entire lives engrossed in the Qurʾan, and who can rightfully be called the 'teachers of the science of the Qurʾan' is another foundation necessary in the commentary of this Noble Book.

There is no doubt that from the first day of revelation of the Qurʾan, due to the awareness of the people about the occasions of revelation and the prevalent circumstances during revelation, a great deal of the understandings of the verses were clear to them and in understanding the goals of the Qurʾan, they were not in need of seeking out the viewpoints and opinions (of others). However, due to the gap in time (between the era of the Prophet ﷺ - the revelation of the Qurʾan and our time), and since those points of the history of revelation are no longer with us, we must seek assistance through the thoughts and viewpoints which would assist us in understanding the issues in regards to the history of revelation. We must never go forth to explain the verses of the Qurʾan without this in place since the thoughts and reflections of a group of people are always at a higher level than the thoughts and reflections of an individual. As we know there is a possibility of an individual falling into error in thought more so than when we reflect and review the thoughts of a group of people.

Of course, what we have just mentioned here is something other than the issue of making our own thoughts and reflections the slave of what others think and giving up the

freedom of thought (on the verses of the Qurʾan). Rather, the purpose here is that in going forth in the commentary of a verse of the Qurʾan, we should not be negligent of the opinions of other commentators, nor should we ignore what others have said, since it is very well possible that by referring to what others have stated, it may actually assist us in choosing an opinion and outcome or may also help us deflecting an error of judgement.

At this point, another issue must be mentioned which is that at what time in the course of the explanation of the verses of the Qurʾan must a commentator refer to the other opinions concerning a particular verse of the Qurʾan? Must he first review and study the various opinions in regards to a particular verse and then when he has become aware of the various opinions, puts forth his struggles and endeavors to separate the truth from falsehood? Or, would he first struggle to bring forth a commentary of his own and then after this, when he is ready to introduce his opinions, he would then refer to the beliefs and thoughts of other people (to compare his work to)?

For the novice in the field of commentary of the Qurʾan, the first path is the most beneficial to take, while the person who is a well-read researcher may choose the second path.

Many times it can be seen that becoming acquainted with the opinions and viewpoints of others may actually prevent a person from going forth to conduct his own independent research and investigation (thus limiting the work of the expert).

9. Distancing Oneself from any Form of Prejudgment

Going forth to study the verses of the Qurʾan with preconceived notions is one of the greatest of dilemmas in the exegesis of the Qurʾan. The person who, with prefabricated beliefs looks at the

Qurʾan and feels that his goal is to search for proofs to back up his own predetermined thoughts through the Qurʾan will never become aware of the true objectives of the Qurʾan and will not be able to reach his outcome.

The commentator of the Qurʾan must look towards this Book with complete objectivity and with no sort of preconceived notions so that he may be able to arrive at the true objectives of the Qurʾan.

Any sort of preconceived ideas act as a major veil between the commentator and the (true) objectives of the Qurʾan and will lead the commentator to having the Qurʾan submit to his beliefs rather than he submitting to the Qurʾan. Instead of being a student of the Qurʾan, he would try to become the teacher of the Qurʾan (imposing his beliefs on the text of the Qurʾan)!

The narrators of ḥadīth from within the Muslim world are in complete agreement that the Noble Prophet ﷺ has stated that:

مَنْ فَسَّرَ الْقُرآنَ بِرَأْيِهِ فَلْيَتَبَوَّءْ مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ.

“Whosoever interprets the Qurʾān according to his own opinion must take for himself a place in the hell fire.”

The meaning of ‘interpreting the Qurʾan according to one’s own opinion’ can be nothing other than that which we have just mentioned.

The interpretation of one verse of the Qurʾan with the assistance of another verse, like when an allegorical verses of the Qurʾan is interpreted by using one of the decisive verses of the Qurʾan, is not in the least problematic. Such a form of interpretation is not considered as commentary of the Qurʾan according to one’s own opinion. Rather, this is elucidating upon the Qurʾan through employing the Qurʾan itself which is

something which we have already spoken about in one of our previous discussions.

What is not permissible is that without relying upon other verses of the Qurʾan and the definitive aḥādīth, due to a person’s previously formed opinions and ideas, he goes forth to explain the verses of the Qurʾan with his own goals in mind! It goes without saying that if a person did not have such preconceived notions (to implant into the Qurʾan) then he would never think about interpreting the Qurʾan in such a fashion.

In the course of history, we see groups of people, referred to as the Bāṭiniyyah [those who claimed to be researching into the inward content of the verses of the Qurʾan] and others who claimed to be ʿUrafāʾ (mystics), and as of recent, other misguided groups - even within our own era - who have played around with the verses of the Qurʾan who have sought to explain The Book according to their own wishes. Not only are these people themselves misguided, rather, they are also the source of misguiding others!

At this point, we bring forth the following simple example and leave the detailed examples and illustrations for another time.

There are a series of verses (19-22) in Sūratul Raḥmān (55) which read:

﴿ مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ ۝ بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخٌ لَّا يَبْغِيَانِ ۝ فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ۝ يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُمَا اللُّؤْلُؤُ وَالْمَرْجَانِ ﴾

“He has made the two seas to flow freely (so that) they meet together. Between them is a barrier that they cannot pass.

Which then of the bounties of your Lord will you deny? There comes forth from them pearls, and coral."

In these verses, the following topics are covered:

1. There are two bodies of water which meet together.
2. Between these two bodies of water, there is a barrier present which does not permit the waters to mix with one another.
3. From these two bodies of water, there are jewels such as pearls and coral, which are extracted.

What is the meaning of these two seas or bodies of water from which pearls and coral are extracted? What is the meaning of the two different types of water which meet together somewhere in this, world; however, as we are told, the water of one sea never mixes with the water of the other sea? Is the difference in the two types of water a natural one - such as one being sweet and delicious tasting water, while the other one is salty and bitter; or is one body of water clear, transparent (clean) water while the other is dark, murky and dirty? Where do these two bodies of water exist in the world today and where can they be found? At present, our discussion is not the actual location of these bodies of water. However, when Muḥy ad-Dīn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240 AD), who was absorbed in the teachings of mysticism *(ʿIrfān)* and philosophy, went forth to comment on these verses, he did so with a mind so engrossed in philosophy and mysticism that he wrote:

"The meaning of the 'bitter body of water' are the corporeal and physical issues (related to the human being) whereas the meaning of the 'sweet and pleasant body of water' is the human spirit; both of these meet in the existence of the human being, and the barrier and separator between them is the 'animal soul', which although does not reach to the level of the human

spirit in terms of purity and refinement, is higher and better than the physical body in terms of darkness and murkiness. At the same time neither of the two dimensions transcend their boundary: neither does the spirit bestow immateriality to the body, nor does the body make the spirit descend and place it among the material entities."[38]

This example should give us a good understanding of what 'exegesis of the Qurʾan according to one's own personal opinion' is and how such a preconceived notion and belief (in a particular science or discipline) can have an effect on the actual commentary of the Qurʾan which a person wishes to express.

10. Awareness of the Philosophical and Scientific Theories

Having an awareness of the philosophical and scientific theories is a valuable source for the mind which would permit the intellect to expand and would lead to valuable interpretations of the Qurʾan. By this we mean that although one must keep away from any form of explanation of the Qurʾan according to one's own personal opinion and must not seek to interpret the Qurʾan in order to justify and validate one's preconceived beliefs and thoughts, however at the same time, possessing an awareness of the thoughts and theories of the great philosophers of Islām in regards to monotheism (Tawḥīd), the characteristics and actions of Allāh ﷻ and other issues in relation to the beginning of creation and resurrection,

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[38] *Tafsīr* of Ibne ʿArabī, vol. 2 pg. 280. This is just one example of exegesis of the Qurʾān according to one's own personal opinion and the book of *Tafsīr* of Ibne ʿArabī, just as his work *Fuṣūṣul Ḥikm* is full of such examples of Tafsīr of the Qurʾān according to his own personal whims and opinions which is both – from the viewpoint of the intellect and also the Islāmic jurisprudence – not permissible.

in addition to having knowledge and understanding of the physical properties and makeup of the world and of mankind, will all lead one to having a better insight. In the end, this awareness and knowledge would actually allow a person to gain more benefit from the Qurʾan.

Today, humanity has made great progress in attaining knowledge of the Earth, universe, and animal kingdom. Humankind has arrived at new horizons of understanding in regards to the sciences of psychology and sociology. Although it is correct to assert that not all of the knowledge that has been gained up until today is completely correct, however having a better understanding of the scientific breakthroughs and discoveries can lead a person's philosophical and scientific awareness to become stronger. This acts as a source of blossoming of the mind of the commentator of the Qurʾan, and grants him a special ability through which he would be able to make use of the Qurʾan in the most complete way.

We narrate the following example in this regard to better understand this point.

The six verses mentioned in the beginning of Sūratul Ḥadīd (57) are the most clear proofs and words which we have in our possession to better understand this point. In this example of ours, we shall refer to and quote only two verses along with their translation:

﴿ هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ۞ هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا

يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَآءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِــيهَا وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُــمْ وَاللّٰهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴾

"He is the First and the Last and the Apparent and the Hidden and He has knowledge of all things. He it is Who created the Heavens and the Earth in six days; then settled on the Throne. He knows that which goes deep down into the Earth and that which comes forth out of it, and that which comes down from the sky and that which goes up into it, and He is with you wherever you are. And Allāh sees what you do."[39]

The philosophical and theological points mentioned in these two verses of the Qurʾan (and indeed in the other four verses which follow) are so great that Imām ʿAlī b. Ḥusayn as-Sajjād ﷺ has stated the following in regards to these verses:

نُزِلَتْ لِلْمُتَعَمِّقِينَ فِي آخرِ الزَّمَانِ.

"(These verses and indeed this chapter of the Qurʾan) were revealed for those people who would come at the end of time who would go forth in deep thinking and pondering."

There is not a single person who could objectively state that with mere knowledge of the ʿArabic language, he would be able to elucidate upon these verses of the Qurʾan. When we (for example) go forth to translate these verses into Farsi, we would still remain in a state of ambiguity and uncertainty in regards to the actual purport of these verses.

However, the knowledge which we have gained through what the researchers of Islām have stated in regards to the encompassing nature of an entity and the science of the

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[39] *Sūratul Ḥadīd* (57), Verses 3 & 4

beginning of creation, act as a tool which permits the blossoming of the mind, which in turn leads us to having a better understanding of the substance of these verses of the Qurʾan.

Is it possible for a person who has never studied anything and never seen a teacher to reach to the depths of the sentence which reads:

﴿ وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَمَا كُنْتُمْ ﴾

"And He is with you wherever you may be."

Can anyone who does not possess deeply grounded knowledge in the teachings of the Divine understand the reality of the part of the verse that reads:

﴿ هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالبَّاطِنُ ﴾

"He (Allāh) is the First and the Last, the Apparent and the Hidden..."

We must repeat this point that: Our purpose in stating this issue is not that we go forth and interpret the Qurʾan through the use of Greek or Islāmic philosophy or through employing the new sciences and that we compare the Qurʾan with these fallible theories. If this was the case, then surely this would be nothing other than commentary of the Qurʾan through our own opinion which is, as we know and as was previously mentioned, prohibited both through employing the logical understanding and the Islāmic legislations! Rather, our aim here is that this form of awareness and knowledge (of other sciences and theories) would actually give our intellect the power and strength to better understand the verses of the Qurʾan with a much more careful precision and in which we would be in a

better position to appreciate the aims and goals intended by this Heavenly Book.

Today, the discussions of the psychologists and sociologists in regards to mankind and the studies of the scholars of the natural sciences in regards to the Earth and Universe have opened up new horizons in understanding the Qurʾan and have given people in this day and age, the power to look at the Qurʾan in a new light.

At this point, the greatness contained in the words of the eighth Imām, ʿAlī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā ﵇ are made manifest. Once, a person asked the Imām ﵇ the following question:

مَا بَالُ الْقُرْآنِ لاَ يَزْدَادُ عِنْدَ النَّشْرِ وَالدَّرْسِ إِلاَّ غَضَاضَةً؟

"Why does the publication and study of the Qur'ān, increase its freshness and newness?"

The Imām ﵇ replied:

لأَنَّ اللّٰهَ تَبَارَكَ وَ تَعَالَى لَمْ يَجْعَلْهُ لِزَمَانٍ دُوْنَ زَمَانٍ، وَ لاَ لِنَاسٍ دُوْنَ نَاسٍ، فَهُوَ فِي كُلِّ زَمَانٍ جَدِيدٌ، وَ عِنْدَ كُلِّ قَوْمٍ غَضٌّ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ.

"This is because Allāh, the Blessed and the High, did not make it (the Qurʾan) for a particular time period nor for a specific group of people. Therefore it is new for every time and fresh for every nation until the Day of Resurrection."[40]

Perhaps it is due to this very reason that Ibne ʿAbbās has said:

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[40] *Tafsīrul Burhān*, vol. 1, pg. 28

أَلْقُرْآنُ يُفَسِّرُهُ الزَّمَانَ.

“Time interprets the Qur’ān.”

The meaning of time is the different thoughts and sciences that appear in the human society, which bestow a new vision to the exegete of the Qur’ān, as a result of which he derives such information from the Qur’ān that the minds of his predecessors never contained.

11. Understanding of the Early History of Islām

The meaning of the ‘early history of Islām’ are those events which took place after the official appointment of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ – specifically that which occurred after the migration to Madīnah as a [significant] portion of the verses of the Qurʾan were revealed after this event. Thus, amongst all of these events, having knowledge of the history of the battles and expeditions which were carried out is very effective in offering commentary on some of the verses of the Qurʾan.

There are numerous verses in regards to events such as the Battles of Badr, Uḥud, Aḥzāb; the event of Banī Muṣṭalaq; the peace treaty of Ḥudaybiyyah; the victory over the city of Makkah (Fatḥul Makkah), the tribe of Banī Nadhīr and the Jewish nation. Thus, having a comprehensive knowledge of the history of these events which have been discussed in the Qurʾan in their own particular way also acts as a clear source for understanding the verses of the Qurʾan which are related to the battles, expeditions and other events and this issue is one of those which is clear and understandable for all commentators of the Qurʾan.

In this regard, one must refer to the authentic and true historical accounts, which have been written by the impartial and nonaligned historians. Through employing a systematic

and methodical process, the correct historical accounts must be separated from the unauthentic reports.

Of course, within the books of history and biography, there are unfounded reports and narrations which are not in line with our Islāmic beliefs, nor are they congruent with the verses of the Qurʾan. Thus for the researcher who possesses awareness of the principles of history, he would be able to differentiate between the truth and falsehood (in these historical reports).

In this regard, we can recommend the following books: *as-Sīrah* of Ibne Hishām, *Murūjul Dhahab* of al-Masʿūdī, *Imtiāʿul Asmāʿ* of al-Maqrizī and *al-Kāmil* by Ibne Athīr. However, it must be understood that we can not accept the entire content of these books. Rather as can be seen, some of them contain issues which have absolutely no foundation and go against both the intellect and the narrated proofs!

For example: In *al-Kāmil* by Ibne Athīr, when he relates the incident of Zaid and his wife, Zainab, he mentions something which no one other than an open and aware enemy [of Islām and the Prophet ﷺ] would claim to have occurred.[41]

In addition, in regards to the attack of the army [from Yemen on the Kaʿbah] and their destruction through the small birds which were sent to destroy them (by Allāh ﷻ), things are mentioned which go directly against the verses of the Qurʾan![42]

The work, *as-Sīrah* of Ibne Hishām, is the best book which has been written in regards to the life of the Noble Prophet of Islām ﷺ. In actuality, this book is a summary of the work, *as-Sīrah* of Ibne Isḥāq, which is unfortunately no longer available. If however, the Muslim scholars are able to find a copy of this

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[41] *al-Kāmil* by Ibne Athīr, vol. 2, pg. 121

[42] Ibid., vol. 1, pg. 263

book in any of the libraries of the world and after making minor corrections and some additional research (on the sources referred to in the book) are then able to have this work printed, then it would not be inconceivable that this book would open up a new horizon on the life of the Prophet ﷺ for us which the *Sīrah* of Ibne Hishām has not been able to accomplish! It should be kept in mind that Ibne Isḥāq was a Shīʿa, while the one who summarized his work, meaning Ibne Hishām, was a Sunni, and thus, in various issues, there was a difference of opinion between them.

12. Familiarity with the Stories and the History of the Lives of Previous Prophets

A great portion of the verses of the Qurʾan are in relation to the history of the previous prophets and we are given a brief insight into the lives of some of these great men and the ways of their struggles with the oppressors and tyrants of their time.

Having knowledge of the history of the life of previous nations such as ʿĀd and Thamūd, or having knowledge of the satanic powers of the oppressors such as those in Bābil [present day ʿIrāq] and the Pharaohs of Egypt, make the verses which speak of the struggles of the various prophets such as Hūd عليه السلام, Ṣāliḥ عليه السلام, Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and Mūsā عليه السلام clear to us.

Information on the lives of the prophets of the Children of Israel (Banī Isrā'īl), especially of prophets Dāwūd عليه السلام and Sulaymān عليه السلام help us understand many of the verses of the Qurʾan. In referring to the verses of the Qurʾan in regards to these two individuals, the truthfulness in our words (in regards to these two prophets) would be made clear to everyone.

Of course in this section, we must not give up our prudence and caution (in conducting research) and must recognize the correct and authentic reports from the incorrect and

unauthentic ones, especially when it comes to the prophets sent to the Children of Israel and the forged traditions known as "Isrāʾīlī" narrations, which are large in number and can never be relied upon.

13. Knowledge of the Historical Environment in which the Qurʾan was Revealed

The Qurʾan was revealed in an environment in which the people were accustomed to a particular style of life and thus, the verses of the Qurʾan which were sent down were suitable to and alluded to the lifestyle, traditions and customs of those people. In addition, the verses also went forth to comment on these people and their (negative) characteristics!

Thus, it is necessary for the commentator of the Qurʾan to be aware of the lifestyle of the ʿArabs before Islām and even those contemporary to the revelation of the Qurʾan so that they are able to clearly understand the verses of the Qurʾan in relation to a particular theme.

For example, the Qurʾan speaks about various issues and topics such as Azlām[43] (animals which have been slaughtered as a sacrifice to the various false gods and idols), and the various idols such as Wadda, Suwāʿ, Yaghūth, Yaʿūqa and Nasra[44]. In addition, the Qurʾan also speaks about issues such as the morals and ethical traits of the ʿArabs and their repulsive acts such as the killing of their female infants45. The verses of the Qurʾan also speak about the relationship which the ʿArabs had with the orphans of the society and tens of other topics in relation to

[43] *Sūratul Māidah* (5), Verses 3 and 90

[44] *Sūrat Nūḥ* (71), Verse 23

[45] *Sūratul Takwīr* (81), Verse 8

the life of the ʿArabs before Islām and during the time of the Prophet ﷺ. Thus, the ability to completely review and explain the verses of the Qurʾan in regards to these issues can only be performed by the person who has a full understanding of the complete way of life of this group of people since the Qurʾan was revealed in the environment and surroundings of these people.

Sometimes, the Qurʾan presents the truths to us in the form of a parable [such as the parable of the falsehood being equated with seeing a mirage in the desert]. However the only person who is able to understand the reality of the parable (of a mirage) is one who has an understanding of life in the desert or lives in a dry and arid land with little to no agriculture.

For example, when Allāh ﷻ mentions the parable of the truth and falsehood as being like a mirage, which one sees and He ﷻ says:

﴿ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَعْمَالُهُمْ كَسَرَابٍ بِقِيعَةٍ يَحْسَبُهُ الظَّمْآنُ مَاءً ﴾

"And (as for) those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in the desert, which the thirsty man deems to be water."[46]

The person who lives in the desert or who has knowledge of the life of such people would be able to better understand the actuality of this parable whereas the person who lives near the banks of a river or in a very grassy, lush area would not, in the beginning stages, be able to fully understand the actuality of this similitude.

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[46] *Sūratul Nūr* (24), Verse 39

14. Knowing the Verses of the Qurʾan which are "Makkī" and "Madanī"

In regards to the time of their revelation, the verses of the Qurʾan are divided into two categories – they are either verses which were revealed before the migration (to Madinah), or those which were revealed after the migration (to Madinah). The first group of verses are known as 'Makkī' while the second group are referred to as 'Madanī.'[47]

The Makkī verses have their own particular style to them and the Madanī verses also have their own style.

The verses which are referred to as 'Makkī' were revealed at a time in which the Muslims lived the life of a small "unknown" group who did not have the power to stand up and struggle against those who opposed them. The condition of their lives did not permit them to go forth to elucidate upon the practical laws of Islām such as Ṣalāt, Ṣawm, Zakāt, Khums and Jihād. Therefore, a majority of the verses of the Makkī period were in regards to the polytheists and a majority of these verses of the Qurʾan were in regards to elucidating on the beliefs and lofty theological issues of the faith of Islām.

However, the conditions which existed in Madīnah were of another form and after seeing that the environment was friendly to them, the Muslims emerged as a powerful force. Consequently, the explanation of the practical laws of Islām was entirely possible. It is for this reason that the verses in

[47] The common and well-known terminologies which are used in the commentary of the verses of the Qurʾān are 'Makkī' and 'Madanī', just as has been stated. However, these verses are known with other words and terminologies which those who are specialists in the field of Tafsīr are well acquainted with.

relation to the practical laws of Islām such as those of Ṣalāt, Ṣawm, Zakāt, Khums and Jihād were revealed in the city of Madīnah.

Being aware of these two types of verses will definitely help a person reach the goal of the verses of the Qurʾan.

The scholar who is not able to correctly differentiate which verse is Makkī and which is Madanī, may say, in regards to the verse which reads:

﴿ ...قُلْ لاَّ أَسْئَلُكُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْراً إِلاَّ الْمَوَدَّةَ فِي الْقُرْبَى ﴾

"...Say (O' Muḥammad): I ask you (Muslims) no reward for my work except love for my close family members."[48]

that it was not revealed in regards to the family of the Prophet ﷺ since the Sūrah which this verse comes from is a Makkī chapter and was revealed in the city of Makkah. Thus, for the Prophet ﷺ to ask for such a thing (love for his close family members) at that time period (when he had no family members) is nothing but him merely expressing an eloquent statement full of pleasantries (with no way to actually implement it).

However, if we look at the books written in regards to the recognition of the Makkī verses from the Madanī verses, it would be clear to such a commentator that simply because a chapter of the Qurʾan is known to be a Makkī chapter does not mean that all of the verses of that Sūrah were revealed in Makkah! It is possible that Makkī verses may be found in chapters of the Qurʾan which are known as Madanī and vice versa.

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[48] *Sūratul Shūrāʾ* (42), Verse 23

More than this, the commentators of the Qurʾan who have considered Sūratul Shūrā (which is where the verse quoted above has been taken from) to be revealed in Makkah have mentioned that specifically this verse (under discussion) and a few other verses of this Sūrah are Madanī.[49]

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[49] We are able to discern which sūrahs were revealed in Makkah and which were revealed in Madīnah by keeping the following two points in mind:

1. The traditions (aḥādīth) which mention to us the place of revelation of a specific sūrah.

2. Pondering over the contents of the verses of the sūrah as this action usually acts as a chain of events and tells us if the sūrah was revealed in Makkah or Madīnah.

Seeing as how the cities of Makkah and Madīnah were two completely different environments, we understand that each was governed by its own ways of thought, and thus the religion of Islām was put face to face with issues and difficulties which were specific to that particular area. Thus, after we are acquainted with the way of thinking and the particular issues of an area (Makkah or Madīnah), and have studied the contents of a sūrah, we are then able to understand where the sūrah or the verses of the sūrah were revealed.

For instance, the environment of Makkah was polluted with polytheism and idol worship. The Jews and Christians had not permeated into this city and thus, those who had true faith (imān) were very small in number. The issue of jihād was not brought up in this environment and in during this time, the Prophet ﷺ had frequent dealings and relations with the idol worshippers. The point of difference of the Prophet ﷺ with the polytheists (of Makkah) was concerning tawḥīd (the Oneness of Allāh ﷻ) and the concept of being brought back to life on the Day of Judgment after the physical death in this world.

It is for this reason that the verses whose axis rotates around the discussion of issues such as the origin (of life), Resurrection Day, reproaching polytheism and speaking about the outcome of the previous generations which were inflicted with the anger and punishment of Allāh

﷾ due to not following His commandments and their appointed Messengers were most often revealed in Makkah.

However the environment in Madīnah was an atmosphere of faith, virtue and piety. It was a center where the Ahlul Kitāb - especially the Jews – had influenced and permeated into. It was an atmosphere of young men, heroes, champions and brave individuals who readily accepted the teachings of Islām. In addition, it was also an environment where the Muslims had little need to discuss the foundational beliefs (Usūl ad-Dīn) of the religion, and thus it was time for them to become acquainted with a series of other issues including their practical responsibilities, ethical and societal guidelines and the performance of devotional acts such as ṣalāt, ṣawm (fasting), zākat and other issues. It is because of this fact that the verses in relation to the *Tawrāt* and *Injīl* and the beliefs of the Ahlul Kitāb (Jews and Christians) and the explanation of the altercations, battles and wars of the Muslims with the Ahlul Kitāb and the polytheists were revealed in Madīnah.

Also, the verses which speak of the principles of etiquette and the commandments of the religion including the obligatory (wājib) and recommended (mustaḥab) acts were all revealed in Madīnah – meaning after the migration (hijrah) of the Prophet ﷺ from Makkah to Madīnah.

Given that the mood in Madīnah was one of interaction between the Prophet ﷺ and the Anṣār (the local people of Madīnah who welcomed the Prophet ﷺ and his followers to their city) and other groups that slowly accepted the teachings of Islām, this limited time frame did not permit the Prophet ﷺ to discuss issues such as condemning the idols and idol worshippers (while in Madīnah – as they had already been covered while in Makkah).

Conversely, the atmosphere in Makkah was not conducive to discussing ethical issues, since the people of Makkah still held doubts concerning the principles of Islām (origin of life and Day of Resurrection), did not attest to the prophetic mission of the Prophet of Islām ﷺ and had not yet developed faith in his universal message. [Taken from, *The Islamic Moral System: A Commentary of Surat al-Ḥujurāt* by Āyatullāḥ Jaʿfar Suḥānī translated by Saleem Bhimji]

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What has been mentioned up until this point are fourteen fundamental pillars of a correct method of commentary of the Qurʾan, some of which have a particular priority associated with them. Even though we are able to group some of them with others in the discussion, such as the eleventh and twelfth points which were 'knowledge of the history of Islām' and 'knowledge of the previous prophets sent and their stories', which could technically be covered under the heading of 'knowledge of the history of revelation of the verses of the Qurʾan', however in order to make this discussion clear and unambiguous, we decided to review each of these separately.

Question

Up until this point, the conditions and fundamental pillars upon which a correct commentary of the Qurʾan lie upon have been made clear. However in relation to this, a question is raised which we must answer: What is the meaning of the phrase mentioned in the Qurʾan of "عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ" or that the Qurʾan has been presented in "Clear ʿArabic"?

If the commentary of the Qurʾan requires such a series of preparatory steps as have been mentioned, then why has the Qurʾan referred to itself with the following description:

﴿ وَ هٰذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴾

"And this (the Qurʾan) is in a clear, understandable, ʿArabic."[50]

In another instance, we read:

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[50] *Sūratul Naḥl* (16), Verse 103

﴿ نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ ۝ عَلَىٰ قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنْذِرِينَ ۝ بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُّبِينٍ ﴾

"The Trustworthy Spirit (Jibraʾīl) has brought this (the Qurʾan) to your (Muḥammad) heart so that you may be amongst the warners, in a clear, understandable, ʿArabic."[51]

Is the meaning of these two verses and many other similar verses anything other than the fact that the only thing needed to explain the Qurʾan is an awareness of the ʿArabic language and nothing else?

Answer

Seeing as how the polytheistic ʿArabs felt powerless in regards to the challenges being offered in the Qurʾan, they were incessantly plunged into deep thought about the origin of this Book. Thus in the end they had to state that, "Muḥammad learned the Qurʾan from two Roman slaves named Jabr and Yasār and others like them"[52], and this is what has been alluded to in a verse of the Qurʾan where it states:

﴿ وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا يُعَلِّمُهُ بَشَرٌ لِسَانُ الَّذِي يُلْحِدُونَ إِلَيْهِ أَعْجَمِيٌّ وَّهٰذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُّبِينٌ ﴾

"And certainly We indeed know that they say, "It is a mortal human being who teaches him (Muḥammad)." The tongue

[51] *Sūratul Shuʿarā* (26), Verse 193 to 195

[52] *Tafsīr al-Kashāf*, vol. 2, pg. 318

(language) of him, they wickedly point to, is notably foreign, while this is ʿArabic, pure and clear."[53]

The original meaning of the word "عجم" is something that is vague or ambiguous and thus a person would be called an "أعجمي" (one who is a non-ʿArab) whose mode of expression was defective – whether he was an ʿArab or a non-ʿArab. Seeing as how the ʿArab did not have an awareness of other than his own language, the non-ʿArab referred to others as ʿAjam as well since they did not properly understand ʿArabic or were not able to speak the ʿArabic language in a correct manner.

Keeping in mind the history of revelation of this verse of the Qurʾan which some commentators have mentioned, the purpose of this verse is to ask the question that: Is it logical to bring up a point of contention that, "Is it right to claim that the Prophet ﷺ had learnt the Qurʾan from such individuals (non-ʿArabs or those who were not eloquent in the ʿArabic language), where as we see that the Qurʾan is replete with eloquence, expressiveness, allure and attraction and has a certain sweetness and harmony to it!?

When we look at the speech of these two individuals (the two Romans mentioned above), we see that they definitely lacked these qualities since they were Romans and were individuals who had no awareness of the ʿArabic language. Even if we assume that they knew the general workings of the ʿArabic language, however still, we know that they could not speak the language well and their words and thoughts were not free from errors and distortion."

Therefore, the true meaning of the verse under review is that the Qurʾan is an accurate speech, an eloquent communication

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[53] *Sūratul Nahl* (16), Verse 103

and is free from all forms of error and distortion (in the language used). Due to this, we are not able to accept the influence of these two individuals or others such as them.

However it must be noted that by the Qurʾan being an eloquent and expressive work, or a writing which is free from errors and distortions does not mean that the prerequisites which have been explained in this book are not needed. Thus, there is no incongruity between requiring such prerequisites as mentioned in this work and the Qurʾan being a work of "plain and clear ʿArabic".

Today in all countries of the world, we see various technical books on the mode of teaching or books of higher learning which have been written in very smooth and fluid style which are far removed from any sort of complexity. Unfortunately though, all of these books, or at least a good majority of them, are still in need of a teacher or instructor (in order to understand them).

In clearer terms we can state that: If the Qurʾan is written in a clear ʿArabic prose, then the meaning of this is that the way that the Qurʾan speaks is not the way that those who do not know ʿArabic would speak – meaning that they would gather a few words, mix them together erroneously and inaccurately and then think that they are speaking ʿArabic. Rather, it is a Book which is completely in line with the rules of the ʿArabic language and is far from all forms of distortion and error in its language and complication of speaking.

This reality is made clearer when we see that throughout the ʿArabian Peninsula during the era when the Qurʾan was being revealed, there were priests who considered themselves as interpreters of the words of the Jinn and Spirits. In their own beliefs and statements, they used to say: "Where as the words of these creatures (the Jinn and Spirits) were in ʿArabic, it was

such an inarticulate and confused speech that with the exception of a limited group of people, no one else could understand what they were saying. In their speaking, more often than not, they would make use of unfamiliar and foreign words."

At this point, we bring forth an example from the words of one of these priests, named Suṭīḥ, who claimed to be an interpreter of the words of the Jinn and who lived during the time of the Prophet of Islām ﷺ. From this narration, it is clear how and why the Qurʾan is known as a Book which has been written in "clear and manifest ʿArabic".

What we quote below is just one line from one of these priests who offered a reply to an ambassador who had travelled from Irān, looking for answers in regards to various inexplicable signs which were seen on the night of the birth of the Messenger of Allāh, Muḥammad ﷺ[54]:

عَبْدُ الْمَسِيحِ عَلَى جَمَلٍ مَشِيحٍ، أَقْبَلَ إِلَى سَطِيحٍ، وَقَدْ أَوْفَى إِلَى الضَّرِيحِ بَعَثَكَ مَلِكُ سَاسَانَ، لارْتِجَاسِ الْإِيوَانِ، وَرُؤْيَا الْمُؤَبِّذَانِ، رَأَى إِبِلاً صِعَاباً، تَقُودُ خَيْلاً عِرَاباً.

"ʿAbd al-Masīḥ[55], mounted on a serious and swift camel[56], has come to Satīḥ[57], who has already approached his death[58]; The

[54] *Farid Wajid Encyclopedia* under the world كهن

[55] ʿAbd al-Masīḥ is the name of the ambassador who traveled from Iran. (Ed.)

[56] The adjective *mashīh* denotes both seriousness and swiftness. It sometimes means "cautious". (Ed.)

[57] Here Saṭīḥ is the name of the addressee of ʿAbd al-Masīḥ. The context of the speech indicates that he was very ill. The word saṭīḥ literally signifies "spread out"; and is also used to denote a water vessel. (Ed.)

Sassanian king sent you due to the tremor of the chamber and the dream of the ruler of magians, who saw [in his dream] an obstinate camel leading an ʿArab[59] horse...”

Just as can be seen in this sentence, expressing himself in the form of rhyme, through employing short sentences and making use of unintelligent words, his thoughts are actually the basis for confusion and bewilderment!

However we see that the style of the Qurʾan is a completely different form, and its style of poetry is a clear and expressive mode. In addition, the ʿArabic used in the Qurʾan is eloquent and articulate. As well, possessing such a form of perfection (in its language and mode of expression as is the case of the Qurʾan) does not prevent us from accepting the fact that from the point of view of its contents, it is such a fathomless ocean of knowledge that it is not possible to dive into the depths of understanding it without a teacher. The conditions (which were previously mentioned) that rule over the exegesis of the Qurʾan must be in place and observed in order to correctly benefit from the contents of this Divine work.

Today, all of the books written in relation to physics, chemistry or even mathematics are, from the point of view of their language, written correctly and with great eloquence and even have pictures and diagrams in them, however in order to understand and make use of these books, one is in need of a teacher!

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[58] Note that the word ḍarīh does not mean “death” but rather a tomb, shrine, trench or an oblong excavation in the middle of a grave. However, the context of the expression implies death. (Ed.)

[59] See Lisān al-’Arab under the root word (ʿa-r-b).

The rules related to the court system have been penned in the most eloquent of styles, are far removed from any sort of errors and distortions in their language, contain no obscurity whatsoever and have been written without any sort of complications. However still, not a single person would permit himself to, without possessing the specific qualifications (to understand such works), make use of these works!

The Qur'an tells us: I speak with complete clarity – I do not speak like those who have no knowledge of the rules of the ʿArabic language whose words are full of errors and distortions (in language), nor do I speak like those priests who converse with the Jinns and Spirits (who too do not possess a correct understanding of the rules of ʿArabic) and who make use of unintelligible sentences and words...

Thus in summary: Verses such as the one below and others which state:

﴿ وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ ﴾

"And We have indeed made the Qurʾan easy to understand for remembrance, then is there any that will receive admonition?"[60]

are in the Qurʾan as a response to two groups of people:

1. The first group are those people who, due to the fact they are not fluent in ʿArabic, would themselves speak ʿArabic in an incorrect manner and full of errors;
2. The second group is those people who have a habit of speaking in inexpressive and contorted ways and have bound themselves to speaking in prose and short

[60] *Sūratul Qamar* (54), Verse 17

> sentences. In place of paying attention to the meaning of what they want to say, they instead place the emphasis on the words they use (and the method of speaking).

However the method of the Qurʾan is something other than is seen in these two forms of speech. Nonetheless, this sophistication in speech does not mean that a person can ignore the need to pay careful attention to the depth of the words being spoken, referring to other verses of the Qurʾan, referring to the history of revelation of the verse and the reliable aḥādīth and other issues in understanding the message of the Qurʾan.

Principally, the person who reaches at a conclusion from the verse quoted above and other such verses that a commentator of the Qurʾan is not in need of referring to anything else (other than the Qurʾan), has not followed the third and sixth conditions from the fourteen conditions which we have discussed in detail nor has he paid any attention to them. Through drawing a conclusion from the verse quoted above, they have neglected another verse which presents Allāh ﷻ and the Prophet ﷺ as the commentators and elucidators of the Qurʾan[61] and others which clearly state that the task of commenting on and explaining the Qurʾan is the sole responsibility of Allāh ﷻ.[62]

At this point, we bring our discussion to a close and end our discourse by quoting the words of the Commander of the Faithful, ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib ؑ. In one particular event, the Commander of the Faithful ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib ؑ sent Ibne ʿAbbās towards the Khawārij (a group of individuals who had in fact,

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[61] *Sūratul Naḥl* (16), Verse 78

[62] *Sūratul Qiyāmat* (75), Verse 19

left the faith of Islām due to their deviant beliefs) to debate with them, however offered him the following advice:

لاَ تُخَاصِمْهُمْ بِالْقُرْآنِ فَإِنَّ الْقُرْآنَ حَمَّالٌ ذُو وُجُوهٍ تَقُولُ وَ يَقُولُونَ... وَ لٰكِنْ حَاجِجْهُمْ بِالسُّنَّةِ فَإِنَّهُمْ لَنْ يَجِدُوا عَنْهَا مَحِيصاً.

"(O' Ibne ʿAbbās!) In your debates and discussions with them (the Khawārij), never resort to replying to them with the Qurʾan, since surely the Qurʾan contains verses which have various probabilities and possibilities to them (in their meaning and understanding). You shall speak to them (with the Qurʾan), and they shall reply to you (with the Qurʾan) and thus, your discussion with them will be prolonged. Rather, debate them using the sunnah since surely in that there is the straightforward and unequivocal reply and they will find no way to misrepresent the truth."[63]

This very valuable sentence clearly tells us that there are some verses of the Qurʾan which have various possibilities in their meaning and it is not possible to specify one meaning to a verse without first going through the introductory steps (of understanding the verse). By merely possessing knowledge of the rules of the ʿArabic language, the section of ambiguities will never be removed. Thus, the only way the ambiguities are removed is through the fourteen ways mentioned in this work.

This ḥadīth also relates to us the fact that all of the verses of the Qurʾan are not straightforward proofs (which can be picked up and used without discretion) and thus in determining the

[63] *Nahjul Balāgha*, Letter 77

true meaning where there is multiple possibilities of a particular verse, we must refer to other ways and means. ۞

Jaʿfar Subḥānī

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In many instances within the Noble Qur'an, Allah ﷻ describes His Book as being presented in a "plain and clear 'Arabic". If this is the case, then why the need to have a treatise on an introduction to the science of Tafsir of the Qur'an? Surely it would be enough to know 'Arabic and then proceed to interpret the Qur'an!

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